



IFR News Adar II/ Nissan 5765

Volume 2 Issue 8

Inside this issue:

Sicily..... 1
the Mediteranian
and the Jews

Today I am a Man 3

Preparing for 4
Shavuot

Issue for Couples 7
Planning Interfaith
Weddings

Authentic faith 8

Shirat Shalom's 10
Purim

Sicily, the Mediterranean, and the Jews

by Rabbi Frank Tamburello



With my grandmother's Jewish last name of Trapani, I have always been interested in the history of the Jews of Sicily. I was fortunate to find several articles by the renowned Italian Jewish historian Nicolo' Bucaria on the subject. Bucaria states that "the origin of Italian Jewry speaks of a past so remote that it seems to be almost legendary." In fact, a Sicilian legend relates that after having destroyed the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, the wicked emperor Titus filled three ships with Jewish men, women, and children, and abandoned them to

the sea without a captain. God sent a storm that caused these three ships to be cast upon the shore: one in Spain, one in Genoa, and one in Sicily. Thus began the relationship of the Sicilian Jews with the Mediterranean Sea.

The Mediterranean was a vast plain of water, and Sicilian Jews saw this as a great commercial opportunity. They populated every cliff of the Sicilian coast, so much so that when the King of Spain (Sicily at the time was ruled by Spain) decreed the expulsion of all the Jews from Sicily, the Sicilian Parliament complained that many islands would remain uninhabited and, therefore, undefended. The Jewish communities along the Sicilian coast were numerous and closely connected through commerce.

Documents discovered in the archives of the synagogue in Old Cairo attest to this fact. Jewish merchants from Trapani sold sugar and Sicilian silk in Alexandria, from where they imported spices and cotton. The children of these merchants studied in Palestine and North Africa, and they corresponded with merchants in India.

IFR Mission Statement

The IFR is a professional organization of rabbis united by a commitment to Jewish tradition and a desire to facilitate the Jewish spiritual growth and life cycle needs of all.

IFR provides a progressive, pluralistic forum, linking member rabbis in a spirit of friendship and a sense of community.

IFR provides support for members in their professional endeavors and offers continuing education. IFR encourages professional relationships with rabbis and other rabbinic organizations.

Jews in Sicily

continued from page 1

In those days, the Jews navigated the seas with such confidence that a Ladino proverb stated: "Dame el mazal, e hechame a la mar" - "Wish me luck, and throw me into the sea." An ancient Spanish-Jewish document reconjs the hiring of a ship to carry Jews from Trapani into exile after the expulsion, leaving Sicily forever.

This contract meticulously enumerates the regulations for observing Shabbat on board. It is strange to note, that whenever seafaring peoples of the Mediterranean are mentioned - Phoenicians, Greeks, Romans, Normans - Jews are never mentioned. And yet, even before Marco Polo, Beniamino da Tudela, departed for a long voyage of exploration around the world. His journal tells of all the marvelous cities that he visited.

The Sicilian Jews were people of the sea. From Trapani, they established ties with Tunisia, and were engaged in tuna fishing among other things. They were very famous, however, for their work with coral, which was used to guard against the evil eye. After the exile, the Sicilian Jews established themselves in Salonika, where they were occupied with fishing and salt-preserving.

Their synagogue became known as "El Call de los Pescadores." Call, the Hebrew word for "community," is today the name of the ancient Jewish quarter of the Sicilian fishing town of Sciacca: la Cadda.

While history records with precision the groups that conquered, dominated, and sacked the island of Sicily, little is mentioned of the one group that brought so many benefits to the island.

The Jews brought to Sicily the art of silk weaving, cultivation of the palm tree and henna. They drew up nautical maps, invented astronomical instruments, began the first mining

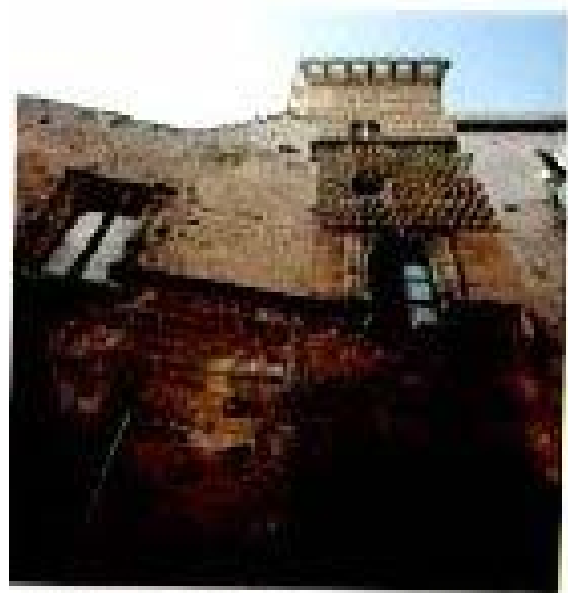
prospects, and translated medical texts from Arabic, texts which, among other things, introduced the concept of vaccine to Europe.

These same Sicilian Jews in exile brought their cuisine onto the mainland of Italy, and we can thank them for the eggplant, chickpeas, and artichokes, so prominent in Italian cuisine today.

In Sicily, the center of the Mediterranean, Jews were free and not relegated to ghettos. They were well-integrated into society.

Today no large Jewish communities remain in Sicily. There do remain, however, the traces of a vibrant Jewish history. The Sicilian government has recently established a museum to preserve the remnants of ancient synagogues along with the history of the contributions of Sicilian Jews, and to provide "a welcoming home to all the Jews of the world."

QUARTIERE DEGLI EBREI DI TRAPANI



“Today I am a Man”

The Bar Mitzvah Experience Italian Style

By Rabbi Barbara Aiello

This article first appeared Venice Gondolier Sun (FL)

In his delightful book, “Haiku for Jews,” David M. Bader applies the 5-7-5 Japanese formula to a universal Jewish experience when he writes:

Today I am a man. On Monday I return
to the seventh grade.

For Joey Capriotti, Bader’s Haiku has special significance. On Saturday, March 26, after he became a Bar Mitzvah, Joey not only will return to school but he will fly back to his home in Florida after having experienced becoming a Bar Mitzvah in Milan, Italy.

As the rabbi of Synagogue Lev Chadash (Hebrew for “New Heart”) here in Milan, I have had the opportunity to experience many “firsts.” Lev Chadash is the first Progressive (Reform) synagogue in Italy. I am the first Progressive rabbi and the first woman rabbi in Italy. In mid March we held our first Progressive wedding ceremony in our tiny sanctuary. Then, just two weeks later, our synagogue hosted its very first Bar Mitzvah celebration.

The young man is Joey Capriotti, bright, determined, with a dry sense of humor and a brilliant smile. His mother and father are examples of what many of us Progressive rabbis feel is the hope for modern Judaism... the interfaith family. The Capriotti’s are part of an Italian-American-Jewish family who have made the commitment to raise their sons in the Jewish faith. And with the help of a small congregation in Bradenton, Florida, Chavurah Ner Tamid, and a Progressive synagogue thousands of miles away in Italy, they have managed to do just that.

Jewish tradition is replete with miracles, but none was more appreciated than the modern miracle of email which helped make Joey’s Bar Mitzvah study Florida and ceremony in Italy an easy thing to accomplish. For nearly a year, Joey’s wonderful teacher, Ner Tamid Education Director, Rena Morano and I communicated about everything from study of the Hebrew language, to selection of Joey’s portion of the Torah that he would read in Hebrew,

to a “Tikkun Olam” (“repair of the world”) community service project, to Joey’s actual practice as a Shabbat service assistant leader.

When all was in order, Joey, along with his mother, Caryn, father, Rich, older brother Matt, Grandpa Bob and a group of nearly a dozen aunts, uncles and cousins, came to Milan. The family had several goals, not the least of which was to have Joey become a Bar Mitzvah in the country of his ancestors and to allow him to connect in a meaningful way with both his Italian and his Jewish heritage.

The connection was a beautiful one. In our little synagogue filled with Italian Jews, some of whom, like me, trace their ancestry back to Inquisition times when the Jews of Calabria and Sicily (40 per cent of the entire population at that time) were systematically wiped out by Torquemada, Joey experienced something that so Americans sometimes forget. Yes, it is possible to be Italian and Jewish!

In his excellent book, “The Wonder of Boys,” author Michael Gurian makes specific suggestions for raising healthy young men. Gurian writes about a boy’s need for rituals in the development of a strong spiritual base and that “stories are the oldest tool for teaching values and morality.”

The ritual of becoming Bar Mitzvah provides Jewish boys with what Gurian agrees is an essential developmental milestone. Jewish stories are the oldest in the world. Jewish texts present opportunities to consider the morality, or lack of it, in human behavior. Joey’s ceremony of becoming Bar Mitzvah, when he stood before his Jewish families from two continents and chanted in Hebrew directly from the Torah scroll, was the culmination of studies that when taught in a relevant, meaningful way, give young boys like Joey a foundation for spiritual growth.



continued on page 5

Preparing for Shevuot

By Rabbi Jeffrey Lipschultz

With the month of June approaching much of our thoughts are turning to the warmth of the summer. Each year we shed our winter clothes and embrace this new weather outside. Living in San Diego we get a great year of weather but when May hits we look forward to the beach and time away from school. It is also the time of year when we look back to the time we were given the Torah and remember our struggle for freedom. This is the interim between Passover and Shevuot.

There is a commandment to count the days in between the holiday of Passover and the holiday of Shavuot (Leviticus 23:15). During those days, the Jewish nation was led from slavery to the giving of the Torah. It is a preparation for the enlightenment of God's wisdom through the Torah. Counting the days, which we do every night when we mention the Omer, hints to a process of spiritual growth that is hidden inside the seven weeks. It states in the *Zohar*, *Seven Sefirot*, or emanations from the Divine, shed an influence each week and each day. This complicated system is explained by the kabbalists and many mystics are able to tap into the spiritual influences of this holy time period though the holiday of Shevuot.

The mystery of the divine is meshed within the context of our oral law in a language that lists the qualities that act as a ladder of spiritual growth. You can find this list in the Mishnah known as Ethics of The Fathers 6:6. The Mishnah tells us that we are to imprint our experiences permanently in our heart to make every day meaningful because sometimes our days are shorter than we expect. Those of us who sat through Yizkor understand how limited our time is and how important it is to make every aspect of it meaningful.

One of the qualities of this process is called "*Pilpul Hatalmidim*", or analysis with students. In order to be wise and receive

enlightenment many mistakenly think it takes only study, but that is incorrect. The sages have taught us an important principle by stating that the path to wisdom is dependent not only on studying but also teaching. Through teaching we strive more to organize our thoughts, we struggle more with the ideas, and they become more real to us. When we teach we learn the true meaning of what the text is speaking to us about and thus are able to pass the knowledge from generation to generation.

A major obstacle to teaching is a feeling of inferiority, "Who am I to teach?" We imagine that only an accomplished sage or learned Rabbi has the right to teach important topics. Yet the sages have taught us that we all possess this gift. It is through the act of teaching that we become an accomplished sage and Rabbi, not the other way around. Often the reason we think we're not ready to teach is because we don't realize what teaching is at all. We think teaching is preaching. To lecture to someone on what you think is not teaching, that is why when we preach to those we want to enlighten, we lose them.

No one wants to listen to someone preach to them. One loses credibility when there is an agenda involved. Why is this ineffective teaching? Because "The more you're in the wisdom; the less God's wisdom comes through." In order to transmit purely the will of the Infinite, you have to be a clean vessel. If a vessel is half filled, it can only transfer half of its capacity. When I was a student at the Jewish Theological Seminary we used to complain that we could not find God in the classroom because he was too busy teaching classes. When one places too much important in themselves they lose the idea that they want to express.

Continued on page 6

"Today I am a Man"

Continued from page 3

As a rabbi, nothing please me more than to be a part of the moral development of young men and young women as they prepare for their special day. Bar Mitzvah means "son of the commandment." Bat Mitzvah brings a young girl into the Jewish community as a "daughter of the commandment." In Milan last Saturday, after Joey hoisted the Torah scroll high above his head and after we hoisted Joey's chair high above the crowd, we were uplifted as well. Thanks to the efforts of so many in America and in Italy who believe in the hope and promise of Inter-faith families, Joey now has his very own intercontinental "meshpucha," a Jewish-Italian extended family, whose warmth, love and exuberant inclusion are examples to us all.

Rabbi Barbara Aiello is rabbi of sinagoga Lev Chadash in Milan, Italy and rabbinic advisor to Chavurah Ner Tamid in Bradenton, Florida.
Write to her at: rabbib@rabbibarbra.com

IFR Rabbis News & Shmooze



IFR rabbi on the west coast, Rabbi Dave Roller's eldest Aviva Natanya will be marrying her fiancé Aaron Kessler in San Francisco, California on labor day. The couple met while both were students at UCLA.

The IFR wishes Rabbi Roller and his family Mazal Tov!

IFR rabbi Rabbi Shlomo (Stuart) Marks of Fairfax, VA and his wife, recently became a saba and safta.

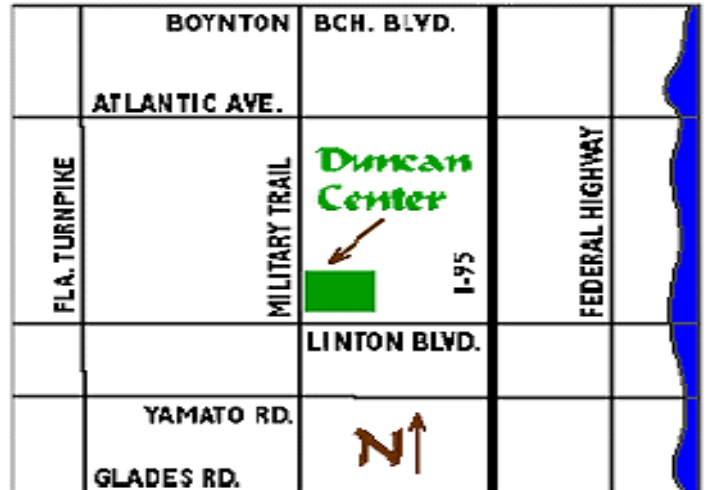
Their oldest son and daughter in law who live in Yerushalayim, had a son. The Marks' attended their neched's Brit Milah in Jerusalem

The IFR wishes Rabbi Marks and his mishpacha, Mazal Tov!

It's official!

IFR Conference will be Tuesday April 4-Thursday April 6 2006 in sunny Delray Beach, Florida

Lets see how we have all "changed" and grown since 2000 & 2001! (photos below)



IFR Conference 2001 Duncan Center-Delray Beach



IFR Conference 2000 Duncan Center-Delray Beach

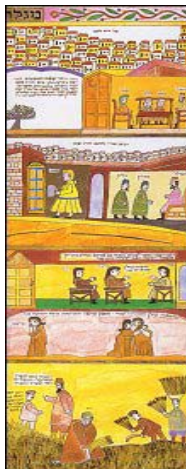
Preparing for Shevuot continued from page 4

The Torah relates that Moses was “very humble.” The sages point out that it was his quality of humility that allowed him to be the conduit for the Torah. Each of the great figures from the holy writings have a nickname, only Moses is called Moshe Rabbeinu, Moses our teacher. He was the greatest teacher of all because he could get himself completely out of the picture and transfer the complete wisdom.

What I have learned from my two years as your Rabbi is that to teach involves learning and experiencing all aspects from each other. On Shevuot we are all learning again for the first time. We stand together prepared to receive the Torah all over again from Sinai and try and gain from each other the wisdom to be better Jews and better people.

Let us promise to build together and learn from each other this year so when we stand again together at Yizkor on Yom Kippur we can be the “Cley Kodesh” holy vessel we strive to be. Let us all become better teachers with our ability to learn from one another. Let us learn from our History at Beth Sholom and build on it to be better Jews and better people

Have a Good holiday



IFR Officers 2004-2006

President: Rabbi Suzanne H. Carter

Vice President: Rabbi Gary Golbart

Vice President and Membership Chair:
Rabbi Roger Ross

Treasurer: Rabbi Richard Allen

Secretary and Membership:

Rabbi Lisa M. Bensinger-Bushnell

IFR Board

Rabbi David Degani

Rabbi Judith Epstein

Rabbi Jeff Lipshultz

Rabbi Howard Meridy

IFR Advisors:

Rabbi Buz Bogage

Rabbi Joseph Gelberman

Legal Advisors:

Cantor L. Jerry Cohn ESQ

Rabbi Lewis Solomon

IFR Board meeting minutes can be viewed on the IFR web site www.intfedrabbis.org

Enter the protected portion and click on the IFR Board minutes located on the menu on the left side.

IFR News Editor

Rabbi Suzanne H. Carter

rabbis@bellsouth.net

Issues for Couples Planning a Jewish/Christian Interfaith Marriage

By Rabbi Judy Epstein

Statistics show that nearly half of all Jews intermarry. The intermarrying couple is faced with a myriad of issues. The first of these issues revolves around the wedding ceremony itself. Who shall officiate? Where will the ceremony be held? Whose needs come first, the desire of the couple, or the sensitivities of the parents? The way couples answer these questions will serve as a microcosm of their decision making process. It will serve as a barometer for such decisions as how will the children will be raised and which holidays will be celebrated in the home.

One of the first choices a couple faces is deciding who will perform the ceremony. The couple must decide on either a secular or religious ceremony. If a Justice of the Peace is chosen, the couple, in effect, delays discussion of key interfaith issues they will face as a family. In doing so, they lose an opportunity to explore how they will negotiate the ins and outs of their new family life. If, instead, the couple chooses to be married by a rabbi, minister, priest, or a combination of clergy, then the couple utilizes the occasion of the wedding ceremony to begin the all-important negotiation process.

Most Christian clergy are agreeable to officiating at a wedding between a Jew and a Christian. Finding rabbis who will participate is more difficult. There is a burgeoning group of rabbis who specialize in this area, but the vast majority of pulpit rabbis will not agree to officiate at interfaith weddings. When looking for a rabbi to officiate at your interfaith wedding, the Internet is a good place to start. Be sure to check out references and even speak to couples who have been married by this rabbi. Beware of rabbis that request payment before even meeting you, or who charge exorbitant rates.

Rabbis specializing in interfaith weddings generally do not have large pulpits. Therefore, much of their income derives from these weddings and the counseling that accompanies them. Fees vary in different parts of the country, but a couple can expect to pay anywhere from \$650 - \$1200 for a wedding that

does not involve overnight travel. Fees are higher if more travel is necessary.

Most interfaith ceremonies are held in wedding halls or other neutral places. Some rabbis are willing to officiate in a church, but this is often a problem for the family of the Jewish partner. The Catholic Church understands that Jews are reluctant to marry in the church and they will give the Catholic partner a dispensation to be married outside of the church.

Often, when making decisions as to where the wedding will be held and who will officiate, a conflict occurs between the wishes of the parents and the desires of the couple. I have seen many a Jewish groom exasperated from the impossible task of pleasing both his bride, who always dreamed of getting married in a church, and his parents, who refuse to attend a church wedding. In cases where a conflict looms between the parents and the couple, I first try to determine if the problem is, in actuality, an inter-generational one.

If, for example, a bride has tears in her eyes explaining that she came to see me only to please her parents, I refuse to take this at face value. With a little prodding I often find that the bride, herself, is just beginning to realize the importance of her traditions. She is thinking of her new home and family, and she wants Judaism to be a part of it. I believe that clergy play an important role in helping couples to differentiate between their parents' desires, and their own burgeoning values. Once this information is established, the question of where and how the wedding will be officiated becomes clearer.



AUTHENTIC FAITH

(How To Be Secure In An Insecure World)

Dr. Brenda Shoshanna

Most of us believe that our happiness and security are dependent upon our relationships, work, income and the external events that take place in our lives. When things are going well there is a sense of well-being and safety. We sleep well at night, wake up feeling refreshed and have the sense that the world can be managed - that we are in control. However, this kind of security is fleeting. As people and events are constantly changing, we are often edgy about what's coming down the road.

We then spend our time and energy trying to manage and control ourselves, others, the whole world. This craze to control takes many forms, it turns into addictions, compulsions, catastrophic thinking. It leads to difficult, unhappy relationships based upon power struggles. It produces anxiety that never seems to dissolve. No matter how much we attempt to strategize and organize, the larger force of life itself, often has its own ideas. Our life then soon becomes an endless struggle, rather than a source of joy. We become unable to go with the turn of the tide that life's changes brings and discover the new momentum that may be coming our way.

A deeper question then arises - if not I, then who or what is in control? How can I feel secure in an insecure world? Where can I place my trust?

These questions have been asked and answered for centuries and different responses have been made, both from the world of psychology and spirituality. Particularly when we live a world filled with upheaval, the answer to these questions needs to be known.

The answer is actually simple. It lies in our deep need to develop Authentic Faith, faith in life, oneself, or a higher power - the kind of faith that becomes our flesh and bones. Hand-me-down beliefs, structures, words, habits and behaviors no longer fill the bill. As the old Zen saying goes, *"Painted cakes do not satisfy hunger."* We urgently crave the real thing.

Authentic Faith is not based upon hearsay or habits. It allows us to release stress, stay centered, and develop a true source of support and self-worth. Authentic Faith restores our original strength and opens new ways of responding. As we develop authentic faith our life takes a completely different turn.

There is a process involved in developing this faith, steps to be taken. The steps are directed to letting of that which is in the way of our intrinsic balance and good-will. We have to start by un-learning much of what we've based our lives upon. Different individuals will resonate to different parts of the process. That is fine. Each step when done completely will take a person where they need to be.

Here are some basic, initial steps and principles:

A) Returning Home –

To begin, rather than racing forward, we stop and turn around. Some call this returning to our original nature. We describe this step as Returning Home.

Rather than continue our frantic search for pleasure, wealth, love, well-being in the external world, this step suggests that we return home to ourselves. We take back our attention from all events and people and return it to who, what and where we are at this moment. As we do this a centeredness, balance and simplicity takes the place of the upheaval we live with most of the time. This step is based upon the principle that difficulties we encounter do not arise from that which is going on outside of us, but from the way we react and respond. As we return home and we become aware of these reactions, we receive a strong glimpse of where our true security lies.

Returning home can include times of walking, meditation, centering, focussing, journalling. All of these have the common denominator of placing our attention back upon ourselves, our breath, feelings, thoughts, sensations - of becoming acquainted with who we truly are, making, friends, becoming intimate. This not only restores our energy, but significantly reduces the endless spin of catastrophic thinking most of us engage in. As we do this we notice it is the catastrophic thinking itself that makes us uneasy, creates scenarios we react to as though they have already taken place.

Unless we can recognize and control this thinking and know who we are, true faith is impossible. Otherwise we are often grasping at straws to calm the storm within.

Continued on page 9

AUTHENTIC FAITH

continued from page 8

Volume 2 Issue 8

B) Letting Go Of False Expectations

Our lack of trust in life, God, ourselves is often fuelled by the disappointments we suffer over and over again. When our hopes, dreams and expectations are not met, insecurity arises, not knowing where to turn. We may not see however, that many of these dashed expectations which cause us so much pain are simply fantasies, dreams, hopes and demands we have placed upon the world. They are all self created. We've dreamt them up, or they have been dreamt up by others and put on our shoulders. Often they have little or nothing to do with what is real - about ourselves, other people or the world we live in.

These false expectations must be made conscious and released, day by day. As we do this and are able to see and accept the world as it is, we find a new basis for living in it. Much anger and stress dissolves easily. We find who we are, where we belong and where our true security lay. Many then become amazed at how light, joyous and at ease they feel - and at beauty and goodness that has always been available to them, day by day.

C) Removing Masks and Games

We wear a mask to greet the masks of others and then wonder why we feel so alone. Though we feel masks provide security, the opposite is true. These masks hide our sense of inadequacy and shame. They keep us separate and unknown, unable to let the light of true warmth and friendship in.. Not only does this cause loneliness it takes our original power and strength away.

In the process of developing Authentic Faith, little by little, we take off our masks. As we risk being and accepting who we are, a miraculous thing happens - our sense of fear and unworthiness vanishes, and our natural inner balance, security and wisdom appear.

"The world is a womb, not a tomb, a place where everything is

engendered and brought to life." Henry Miller

Dr. Brenda Shoshanna, www.brendashoshanna.com, is author of LIVING BY ZEN, (Timeless Truths For Everyday Life), www.livingbyzen.com. A psychologist, long term Zen practitioner, Torah Based counsellor, speaker and workshop leader she is also the author of ZEN MIRACLES (Finding Peace In An Insane World, Wiley, and ZEN AND

THE ART OF FALLING IN LOVE, (Simon and Schuster). Dr. Shoshanna offers talks and workshops both for clergy, professionals and those in the community on all aspects of relationships, and developing authentic faith. She is the relationship on i.village and can be reached at top-

IFR DUES 2005-2006

Now is the time to renew your membership in the IFR. Please make your check for \$150.00 payable to:

The International Federation of Rabbis

You may also pay your dues in two payments, \$75.00 now and a postdated check for \$75.00

Send your check (s) to the IFR treasurer

Rabbi Richard Allen, Treasurer
International Federation of Rabbis
1647 Edge Hill Rd.
Abington, PA 19001
215-657-3737
www.IntFedRabbis.org
allen@rabbiallen.com

